

ABOUT MUSIC

– By Mariss McTucker

GT Hurley: *Tough Horses*

Recorded at Point A Studios on Finley Point, by Stacy Santilli and Troy Ricciardi; mixed by Santilli; and mastered by Nathan Zavalney, Missoula Soundworks, Missoula, MT, 2012
Produced by Dave Stamey, recorded by Rick Sutton at Sutton Studios, Atascadero, CA, 2012



Big Timber cowboy/singer-songwriter GT Hurley has put out his first collection of 11 western tunes, all but two written by him.

The retired Marine and quarter-horse breeder writes songs about the life he's lived, and what he feels and observes ("the taste of gunpowder, the smell of horse sweat and the damp dark of the hard-rock mine"). Such memories give his storytelling the clear eye of reality, and others have noticed. He was nominated for the 2012 Crescendo Award at the Western Music Association Awards ceremony in the fall.

Hurley is backed on the CD by a sterling cast of performers: Dorian Michael on guitar and resonator guitar, Ken Hustad, upright bass, Bill Severence, drums, and Kenny Blackwell, mandolin and resonator guitar. Hurley adds acoustic guitar as well, and back-up vocalist Annie Lydon contributes the just-right female voice.

The title song starts us out, a cantering rhythm apt for the "Tough Horses" moniker. Waylon Jennings' influences come through in Hurley's rich baritone, and the guitar talks some slick riffs.

Gary McMahan's gritty "Big Enough (and the Cheyenne Mare)" gets its historical due in this clip-clopper. It's atmospheric ("and the horses that he raised could punch a hole in the prairie air"), and punctuated with snappin' rhythm, stinging guitar and a cool mandolin break.

Hurley's retelling of the men lost to the 1917 Speculator Mine fire in Butte ("Granite Mountain Fire") is tragic and mournful; Lydon's harmony vocals and some moody resonator guitar lend the right touch.

The slow and tender "Damascus Road," the story of a man who nearly dies in a mining accident only to be given a second chance, is thoughtful and thankful. Hurley wrote it three days before recording it.

Crisp drums and way-bent guitar-slinging drive the all-things-horse piece, "He's A Vaquero." Lydon and Hurley smoke the harmonies on this one.

Terri Taylor's "Born to Ride" is a bluegrass loper, with light and tasty mandolin. Hurley's waltz, "Montana Skies," finds him channeling Marty Robbins. And if "One Less Horse" doesn't move you, you're dead.

Hurley's Montana authenticity oozes from every note on the CD. It's easy to see why he's making his mark in the world of western music. Superb production and good musicianship from everyone involved make this one go.

Visit www.gthurley.com.

House of Quist

Produced by David DeVore, engineered by Patrick McKenna, mixed and mastered by Brett Allen at Snow Ghost Studios, Whitefish, MT, 2012

The House of Quist, featuring three members of the Quist household, has just released their self-titled CD of 10 original rock tunes.

For those who have been living on the moon for the last 30 years, the Quist name is written in stone in Montana-made music. Rob Quist was a founding member of Mission Mountain Wood Band and went on to form Rob Quist and Great Northern. His kids learned music at his knee, and each excelled at it.

Son Guthrie met drummer Patrick McKenna at college and they started a band; and Halladay toured Europe with Montana's renowned jazz ensemble, the Jubileers, before joining the trio.

The current configuration features Halladay on bass and vocals; Guthrie, guitar and vocals; Rob on backup vocals, guitar, banjo and steel; McKenna, drums and percussion; and Matt Brua, guitar. Chauncey Allison offers additional backup singing, and Troy Ricciardi contributes rhythm guitar.

The band kicks out songs of love, anguish, and hope. All are written by Guthrie, with the exception of "Nothin' to Lose," co-written with Halladay and Rob. Standout bass, drum and guitar work abound, with both Guthrie and Matt taking turns on guitar leads.

The first number starts bluesy and sleepy-eyed, a country shuffle called "Little Things." It's evident from the start that the siblings have sung together for many years. Their tight harmonies provide great duet singing, with Halladay's nice alto/soprano sound meshing well with Guthrie's baritone lead.

Excellent, throaty bass rhythm from Halladay underpins the moody "Save the World"; the vocal lead alternates between the relatives, Guthrie's boisterous voice complemented handsomely by Halladay's higher range.

Guthrie growls out the lyrics to "Tarzan (I'm a Man)," with its syncopated tempo and squiggly, fuzzed-up guitar entwining the vocals.

"She Flies" provides a quieter and earthy change of pace; it's a pretty and gentle waltz with jazzy chords, and soft banjo and a touch of silky steel guitar from Rob. A soaring chorus is followed by a thick and crunchy instrumental interlude, reprising to the soft melody.

Halladay gets to stretch her pipes on the jammin,' hell-bent "Nothin' to Lose." She wails on great long tones in the vocals and has that perfect hint of attitude ("Ya got me feelin' like ya just don't care ..."); the last part of the number cools down with a nice vocal harmony, then ramps back up.

The final piece, "I Remain," is hopeful – the rocked-out, rough-cut sentiment of a survivor. Guthrie intones, "What's lost cannot be regained, yet I remain," while McKenna's percolating, sterling drum and crisp high-hat work rocks the tune along.

The mix on some of the songs is a bit overpowering at times, but all in all,



good production encompasses this album from the next Quist generation and friends.

Producer David DeVore, by the way, engineered and produced many of the names synonymous with arena rock, including Santana, Fleetwood Mac, Elton John, Foreigner and REO Speedwagon. He now lives in Polson, and will be featured in an upcoming documentary on the famed Sound City Studios.

Visit www.houseofquist.com for more information.

Josh Farmer Band

Produced by Josh Farmer and Tommy Pertis, engineered and mixed by Pertis at The University of Montana, Missoula, MT, 2012

Young Missoula composer and pianist Josh Farmer and his bandmates have released their self-titled debut EP album, with four thematic pieces that fluidly revel in a mixture of jazz, funk, rock and soul.

Farmer wrote them, and wants us to embrace the "chillaxed" nature of the CD.

We are willing to follow, thanks to the terrific nature of the group's playing. Other members are UM professor Tommy Pertis, guitar, Jesse Christian, bass, and Valley Lopez, drums.

Growing up in tiny Manhattan, Farmer listened to his mother play piano and his father play guitar. His father introduced him to the vocal and piano stylings of British jazz-pop vocalist and pianist Jamie Cullum, and Farmer was hooked. He took piano lessons from noted Montana artist Ann Tappan as well, further cementing his style.

He also studied at The University of Montana and New York University, where a mentor told Farmer to "play piano your own way."

Farmer studied jazz piano, but the band's sound is more universal than that. The first number, "Sapphire Eyes," opens with Farmer's wacky Cuban piano nuances and syncopated lyrics, Lopez's tight and clean snap of drums, and Pertis picking away at a catchy Latin riff, creating an exotic minor mood. Farmer's tenor voice is very accomplished, and he utters words with a smooth sibilance. There's grand tickling of the ivories in an instrumental break; then Pertis takes off on a sizzling electric guitar interlude. The group ends the piece abruptly. Tight!

Lopez has the soft brushes talking, setting the bluesy beat to "January Rain." Farmer's dissonant, pretty piano chords set the groove. He almost whispers the lyrics, slowly rocking us. Then there's tiptoe-ing on the keys and slithery wah-wah guitar riffs before the tune boils up to a bluesy simmer.

Deep, throbbing bass notes from Christian kick start the R&B-tinged "How the Fire Glows," and Farmer sings, "Careful with the words you're saying, ... I could be a fearless warrior." Farmer mixes barrelhouse trills and fluid jazz riffs, and Pertis's hypnotic, Dire-Straits-like guitar work creates a nice ambience. The bass line is perfectly understated, as is the gentle tapping of percussion.

The hopeful last tune, "Comin' Back Alive," iterates Farmer's spiritual view that staying in touch with the Earth is tantamount to our well-being. Lots of percolating rhythm propel Farmer as he raps out the lyrics ("Come back into nature, align yourself with all the perfect harmony filling your world ..."). Then it's off into a terrific piano break followed by dazzling and fiery fretwork from Pertis. Chillaxing, for sure, and way danceable!

Thematic is the word on this EP; the fellows stretch out in the several melodic stanzas of each song. Watch for more from Farmer and his terrific combo – they're heading to the recording studio again soon.

Visit facebook.com/joshfarmerband.



John Guymon: *It's Not Politics People*

Recorded by Houston Green, Tate Music Studios, produced by Tate Music Group, Mustang, OK, 2012

Kalispell singer-songwriter John Guymon writes his originals like he lived them. And in fact, he did. He grew up in Whitefish, feeling neglected, and left home at 15 to find himself. He became a long-haul trucker and honed his style on the road.

Later, he overcame a debilitating illness and found his strength in writing and singing. His strong religious faith and vision carried him through, and he finally got a diagnosis that led to improved health.

Guymon had put out a single earlier in life, and his band placed 14th on the "Make a Star" national web-TV talent show in 2009. He never looked back. In January, Guymon signed a recording contract with the Tate Music Group out of Oklahoma.

His new CD sports just his voice, 12-string guitar and drums. Production is understated, highlighting his story lines, and his eight tunes, sung in a gravelly, trebly baritone, encompass themes of lost love, politics, God, and humanity's foibles.

His song poems, a lot of them in a folk vein, feature dialogs with others at times, giving an intimate feel. Influences heard here and there include Neil Young and Bob Dylan, whom he calls "controversial storytellers."

The first tune, "Burning Bridges," is tender and melodic; Guymon questions another about the consequences of his actions ("Whatcha gonna do when that last door slams..."). The bluesy "I Ain't Easy" comes next; our protagonist asks why another is trying to change him. Guymon has an expressive, world-worn voice, and uses a nice bit of high tenor here, adding to the feel.

The moody country-rock "Don't" tells others not to feel sorry for him, but to worry about the children and their future, and to change things for the good.

The ballad "Just Couldn't Be" starts out slowly, but soon gets up-tempo with a country-rock feel. Guymon seeks to know what more one can ask from him as he growls out the words ("I tried to make it but never enough is all you'd say," he yips).

The last tune, "We're All Human" has slappin' drums and Guymon singing, "I was taught at a young age, you're not like us, so go away." He speaks of the divisiveness among people, and the state of the country today. In a recording packed with themes, Guymon reminds us of what's important in life.



State of the Arts welcomes CDs

State of the Arts welcomes CD submissions by Montana musicians for inclusion in the About Music section. The recordings must be professional, commercially available, full-length CDs, with cover art and liner notes. Brief biographical information on band members would be helpful to the writer.

Please send submissions to either the Montana Arts Council, PO Box 202201, Helena, MT, 59620; or Lively Times, 33651 Eagle Pass Trl., Charlo, MT 59824.